

proclaim the glad tidings of salvation to the spiritually destitute.

"To heal the broken-hearted" is omitted from the revised version because it is not found in some of the manuscripts, but it is found in most of them and the truth contained is so valuable and prominent a part of our Lord's gracious ministry that the passage would appear incomplete and marred without them. These words have been a source of unmeasured comfort to all generations.

"To proclaim liberty to the captives" refers to the fact that prisoners as well as slaves were set free in the jubilee year. Its higher meaning is that through redeeming love those that are led captive by Satan have liberty provided for them and offered in the gospel. The sentences following are a continuation of the thought of liberty through redemption. "The recovering of sight to the blind" refers literally to coming out of the dungeon into the clear light of day. The Biblical conception of the estate of the natural man is that he is bound with the bonds of sin and the saved are delivered from this bondage, and this deliverance is procured and bestowed by Christ.

"He closed the book and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fastened on him," and he said in substance: "This preaching to which you are now listening is itself the realization of this prophecy." "And all bore him witness and wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of his mouth."

Sunday School

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

Sunday, December 26, 1909. Matthew 2: 2-12.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"And thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins."—Matt. 1: 21.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

M.—Matt. 2: 1-12.

Th.—Heb. 1: 1-8.

T.—Matt. 2: 13-23.

F.—John 1: 1-14.

W.—Isa. 9: 1-7.

S.—Luke 2: 8-20.

S.—1 John 4: 1-14.

SHORTER CATECHISM.

Q. 87. What is repentance unto life?

A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.

TOPICAL OUTLINE.

Seekers After Christ—

Where they came from, vs. 1, 2.

How they found him, vs. 3-9.

How they treated him, vs. 10-12.

LESSON COMMENTS.

The lesson before us has two sides, the earthly and the spiritual. Each of them bears a due relation to the subject, but the spiritual is the more important. The earthly lessons possess a temporary interest; spiritual present themes for all time.

The Earthly Aspects of the Visits of the Magi.

The statement of the magi was, "We have seen his star in the east." The literal reading is, "We have seen the star of him in the East," the star which points to him. Astronomers tell us that for two years previously there had been in the skies a series of remarkable conjunctions of the stars, and the astrologers of the East had attached to this a great deal of significance. Granted that it was a superstitious significance; still God uses even the superstitions of this world to further his plans. It set the scientists of the world on the alert. But these conjunctions do not satisfy the narrative. For the record is that the star which they saw in the East went before them and stood over the house in which the young child lay. There must have been therefore some phenomenon whose locality was within our atmosphere. What it was, we know not; nor is it worth while to speculate.

Much has been written about a general expectation that was prevalent in the Eastern world of the arrival at about this time of some heavenly visitant on earth. There is no need to wonder about this. In the Book of Daniel is the prophecy that "seventy weeks" after the decree to restore and build Jerusalem such a visitant should come. The miraculous deliverance of Daniel (prime minister of Babylon and of the Medo-Persians) from the mouth of the lions had made his prophecy renowned in all that country. Their calculations would easily raise such an expectation and would lead the magi to seek in Judea for the expected visitant.

The Spiritual Side of the Magi's Visit.

And yet—These magi were of idolatrous extraction. They had been trained in the worship of images and in the superstitions connected therewith. They came to Judea with gold, frankincense and myrrh. Gold is a gift suited for presentation to a king; it was natural that they should bring gold. Frankincense is an offering that is presented only to a god. How came they to bring frankincense? Myrrh was the ancient remedy for suffering and pain; how can we explain their presentation of myrrh? We who know the life and the history of Christ and his death on the cross, can easily see the adaptability of it. But how came these magi to bring the myrrh? The answer to us is a clear one. The Holy Spirit put into their minds the thought and the desire to honor this new born king. True it was counter to all their prejudices to render honor to a despised Jew; yet the Spirit of God overcame the aversion. And the same direction of the Spirit led them to bring gifts of whose propriety themselves knew nothing, that the gifts might be a pledge to Joseph and to Mary, and to all who knew of it, of the providence and guidance of God in all the blessings and all the trials and sufferings of the years to come.

Another spiritual aspect of the matter lies in the suggestion that it gave to his parents (and to all who knew of the visit) that God intended that the ministry of this Saviour should extend to the Gentile world. The feeling among the Jews was that salvation could be had only through union with the Jewish Church. Here is an intimation to the Jews that God had plans for the extension of saving privileges to the dwellers in the East also. True it is not clear and full, but its occurrence in connection with the birth of the child is a strong intimation.

On the other hand, though the magi were of heathen extraction they met with no repulse at the cradle of the Redeemer. They were welcomed. A few weeks prior to this the angels had declared that they brought good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. Yes, to all people. These Gentiles went back with the consciousness that their worship had been accepted by God.

We have been accustomed to think of Old Testament days as a time in which the ministration of the Holy Spirit was quite limited. And yet here we see the Spirit making these men desire to go to the despised nation of the Jews to welcome a newcomer who should eclipse their own kings. In this we can but perceive a peculiar exertion of the Spirit's influence.

The Name Jesus.

With us in this twentieth century a name is simply the designation of a person. With the Hebrews it was different. A name was intended to be a description of character. Adam called his wife Eve because the word Eve indicated life and she was to be the mother of all living men. Before the covenant of circumcision the father of the faithful was called Abram, or mighty father; after the covenant (which was a church covenant for all nations) God called him Abraham, the father of many nations. In like manner, because the child of Mary was to be the Redeemer of sinners in every part of the world, the angel told her at his first visit that she must call his name "Jesus." And for the reason that the word Jesus means Saviour. The Lord desired that on our every mention of the Redeemer we should be reminded that he is our Saviour. So then when the Jews rejected him they reject him as Saviour. The very name reminds the hearer rejects him as Saviour. he very name reminds the hearer that he has to deal with the One who came to earth to save him. Trifle not with his offers of blessing.